

A NEW *BRACHYASPIS* (SERPENTES: ELAPIDAE)
FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

A new species of snake *Brachyaspis atriceps* is based on two specimens from Lake Cronin in the southern interior of Western Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The generic classification of the Australian Elapidae urgently requires revision, none more so than the small snakes with undivided anal and subcaudals. The placing of the present species in *Brachyaspis* is therefore only tentative.

Brachyaspis atriceps sp. nov.

Holotype

R67330 in Western Australian Museum, collected on 6 October 1979 by P. Griffin and G. Barron in open eucalypt woodland on sandy loam at Lake Cronin, Western Australia, in 32°23'S, 119°45'E.

Diagnosis

A small elapid snake with large black head; large, somewhat obtrusive eyes; narrow neck; 19 scale rows at midbody; anal and subcaudals single. Further distinguishable from *B. curta* (Schlegel) by head parallel-sided in plan (rather than widest at rear, from which it steadily narrows towards pointed snout), fewer temporals, longer tail, more numerous ventrals and subcaudals, and iris entirely golden orange (rather than uppermost sector only). Further distinguishable from *Denisonia suta* (Peters) by lack of pale stripe through eye, longer tail and more numerous subcaudals.

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Fig. 1. Holotype of *Brachyaspis atriceps* photographed in life by G. Barron at type locality.

Distribution

Only known from two specimens from one locality in semi-arid southern interior of Western Australia.

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 379 (holotype), 430 (paratype). Length of tail (% SVL): 17.9, 18.2. Weight of holotype: 18 g.

Rostral wider than high. Internasals less than half as long as prefrontals. Frontal nearly twice as long as wide; anterior facet almost straight, i.e. transverse; sides almost parallel; a little wider than supraocular. Nasal entire, long and narrow (widest at contact with rostral). Preocular in short contact with nasal, widely separated from frontal. Postoculars 2, subequal. Temporals 2 + 2; lower primary much the largest, widely separated from lower postocular, in contact with lip (in point contact in paratype and on one side of holotype; in moderately broad contact on other side of holotype). Upper labials 6. Lower labials 7. Dorsals narrow near midline, gradually widening on sides; not striate; in 19 rows at mid-body, reducing to 13 well before cloaca. Anal entire. Subcaudals 48, 46; single. Ventrals 179, 177.

Top and sides of head matt black, upper lips narrowly edged with white. First transverse row of scales behind black of neck partly brownish white. Rest of upper and lateral surfaces moderately dark brown. Lower labials and chin shields greyish black, each with a wide central white streak. Gulars and first few ventrals whitish, anteriorly edged broadly and irregularly with blackish grey. Rest of under parts very pale reddish brown.

Paratype

Eucla Division (W.A.): Lake Cronin (29770).